

## ***Edwin 'Bud' Shrake: Famed writer remembered as a giant in Texas literature***

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**David Flick contributed to this report.**

AUSTIN – Fort Worth native Edwin "Bud" Shrake, one of the state's most revered writers, died Friday morning of cancer. He was 77.

The novelist and former *Dallas Morning News* columnist was best known for his witty, observant sports prose and as co-author of *Harvey Penick's Little Red Book*, an inspirational golf guide that is the best-selling sports book in publishing history.

He was also a biographer, screenwriter, playwright and raffish correspondent with literary friends, including Larry L. King, William Styron and George Plimpton. And, as companion to Gov. Ann Richards, he was well-known as "first guy" of Texas.

"Bud was a treasure," said his friend, screenwriter and photographer Bill Wittliff of Austin. "He was one of those who took the raw material of our history and was making real literature of it. He was one of the greats with Larry McMurtry and Cormac McCarthy. We were fortunate indeed to have his voice."

'Anchor of my life'

Mr. Shrake married three times, twice to the mother of sons Creagan and Ben. But the love of his later years was Ms. Richards. He is to be buried beside the woman he called "the anchor of my life for 17 years" in the Texas State Cemetery.

"It was impossible to meet Bud Shrake and not fall in love with him," Austin screenwriter and friend Anne Rapp said. "His words, his smile, his integrity. That kind of person never dies."

With the Mad Dogs, a cabal of rebellious Austin writers who worked hard and played harder in the 1960s and '70s, Mr. Shrake led a rich, rascally life that often found its way into his work.

"Shrake has always been an intriguing talent, far superior to his drinking buddies" Pulitzer Prize-winning author Larry McMurtry wrote in 1981.

Mr. Shrake went to Europe, he said, "to protect himself from himself" while novel-writing because the pubs closed at 11 p.m., when things were just getting lively back home.

In 2008, the University of Texas Press published *Land of the Permanent Wave, An Edwin "Bud" Shrake Reader*, with the author's candid introductions to his works and letters.

The anthology takes its title from a May 1970 *Harper's Magazine* story about destruction of the Big Thicket by timber interests.

Rejected by *Sports Illustrated*, where Mr. Shrake was a staff writer and a lumber company was a stockholder, the story was picked up by *Harper's* editor Willie Morris, who said, "To me few finer magazine essays have been written."

Over Mr. Shrake's nearly six-decade career, the 6-foot-6 writer tackled everything from *Billy Boy*, a coming-of-age novel set in Fort Worth with a guardian angel and golf champ Ben Hogan, to *Peter Arbiter*, a takeoff of Petronius' *Satyricon* that compared Rome's decadence with that of oil-boom Texas.

All but one of Mr. Shrake's scrupulously researched novels were set in Texas, and Steven L. Davis, assistant curator of the Southwestern Writers Collection and *Shrake Reader* editor, says "three – *Strange Peaches*, *Blessed McGill* and *But Not for Love* – are ranked by literary scholars as among the best ever written about Texas."

University of Texas professor Don B. Graham, an authority on Texas literature, said: "When anybody asks me what Dallas was like during the time of the Kennedy assassination, I always refer them to one book: Edwin 'Bud' Shrake's *Strange Peaches*."

At the time of the assassination, Mr. Shrake was working at *The News* and dating Jada, nightclub owner Jack Ruby's star stripper. And in *Strange Peaches*, he describes the real-life moment when, standing with his camera at Main and Houston, he locked eyes with the tanned, smiling president in the black limousine.

The author's favorite novel, written after he "finally quit drinking booze, smoking cigarettes, taking speed and snorting coke," was 1987's *Night Never Falls*, about foreign correspondent Harry Sparrow (the fantasy Shrake) trapped with the French in Dien Bien Phu.

He co-wrote Willie Nelson's autobiography in 1988. And in 1992, the *Little Red Book* came out and sold more than 1.6 million copies. It spawned three sequels and allowed him to follow his bliss of becoming a full-time novelist. He was more than 100 pages into his 11th novel when he died.

#### Fort Worth roots

He was a graduate of Fort Worth's Paschal High School, where he and Dan Jenkins (later the author of *Semi-Tough*) wrote for the school newspaper.

The young Shrake followed Mr. Jenkins to the *Fort Worth Press* in 1951.

At the *Press*, he worked under legendary sports editor Blackie Sherrod, who was later with *The News*.

"When Dan Jenkins brought him to me ... he immediately showed talent and went on to remarkable success and acclaim far beyond the pressbox," Mr. Sherrod wrote in an e-mail Friday. "He said later that had it not been for that introduction he probably would have become a lawyer.

"Bud will be missed but his work insures that he will never be forgotten and like they say down on the farm: He done all of us proud."

Gary Cartwright, his friend of 50 years, was a rival at the time.

"We both had the police beat," he said Friday. "He was at the *Press*. I was at the *Star-Telegram*. I followed in his footsteps. He was like a big brother to me. He became a writer, so I became a writer. He was generous, kind and brilliant, a very honest writer."

While at the *Press*, he earned a degree in English and philosophy from Texas Christian University and in 1958 went to the *Dallas Times Herald* with Mr. Sherrod. Three years later, *The News* hired him to write a daily sports column.

In 1964, he moved to New York and joined Mr. Jenkins at *Sports Illustrated*, where editor André Laguerre considered him a "literary" sportswriter.

If he was a Mad Dog in his hard-living youth, Mr. Shrake was also a spiritual, sophisticated seeker.

Suffering with lung cancer and given 18 to 24 months to live, he urged friends last year at the Southwestern Writers Collection, home of his huge archive, at Texas State University in San Marcos, to heed Johnny Mercer's lyrics: "You've got to accentuate the positive. Eliminate the negative. Latch on the affirmative. Don't mess with Mister In-Between."

Jane Sumner is a freelance writer in Austin. Staff writer David Flick contributed to this report.

#### Career highlights

**Journalist:** *Fort Worth Press* (1951-1958), *Dallas Times Herald* (1958-61), *The Dallas Morning News* (1961-64), *Sports Illustrated* (1964-1979).

**Novelist:** *But Not for Love* (1964), *Blessed McGill* (1968); *Strange Peaches* (1972); *Peter Arbiter* (1973), *The Borderland* (2000), *Billy Boy* (2001) and *Custer's Brother's Horse* (2007).

**Screenwriter:** *J. W. Coop* (1971), starring Cliff Robertson; *Kid Blue* (1973), starring Dennis Hopper; *Tom Horn* (1980), starring Steve McQueen; and *Songwriter* (1984) starring Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson.

**Celebrity "as told to" biographer:** *Willie: An Autobiography*, with Willie Nelson (1988); *Bootlegger's Boy*, with Barry Switzer (1990); *Harvey Penick's Little Red Book*, with golf guru Harvey Penick (1992). All hit the bestseller list.

Source: The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University, staff research.